

Social Sciences Entry Competencies

The Social Science Workgroup of the Missouri Department of Higher Education wish to present the following entry-level competencies in an effort to establish what they feel are the essential standards for successful entry into postsecondary social science coursework. The following competencies outline both general and discipline-specific knowledge. These standards are based upon the earlier work of the Association of American Universities and the PEW Charitable Trusts (*Social Sciences, A report for Standards for Success*, pp: 55-65. www.s4s.org).

I. General Knowledge and Skills

Successful students have a basic understanding of the social sciences (anthropology, history, economics, geography, political science, sociology). They:

- 1) Distinguish between the different characteristics that define the disciplines within the social sciences.
- 2) Are aware of current world events, issues, and problems and know how concepts and theories in the social sciences can be applied to understand them.
- 3) Perceive events and circumstances from the vantage point of others, including those in racial and cultural groups different from their own; from the other gender, from other ages; and from those who live under other political and economic systems.
- 4) Are able to identify and analyze problems appropriate to the social science discipline being studied.
- 5) Are able to distinguish between, read, and comprehend primary and secondary documents.

II. History

Successful students know significant periods and events in United States history. They understand important events, social movements and political processes that have shaped U.S. and World history, and are aware of the major historical figures that influenced history. These include but are not limited to:

- 1) The evolution and distinctive characteristics of major early Asian, African, and American pre-Columbian societies and cultures.
- 2) The connections among civilizations from earliest times, and the gradual growth of global interaction among the world's peoples, speeded and altered by changing means of transport and communication.
- 3) Comparative history of selected themes, to demonstrate commonalities and differences not only between European and other societies, but among European and non-European societies themselves.
- 4) Varying patterns of resistance to, or acceptance and adaptation of, industrialization and its accompanying effects, in representative European and non-European societies.
- 5) The adaptation of both indigenous and foreign political ideas, and practices in various societies. Borrowers of other's political ideas, exporters of political ideas.

- 6) The interplay of geography and local culture in the responses of major societies to outside forces of all kinds.
- 7) The evolution of American political democracy, its ideas, institutions, and practices from colonial days to the present; the Revolution, the Constitution, slavery, the Civil War, emancipation, and civil rights.
- 8) The development of the American economy; geographic and other forces at work; the role of the frontier and agriculture; the impact of technological sources and urbanization on land and resources, on society, politics, and culture. The role and emancipation of American labor.
- 9) The gathering of people and cultures from many places, and the several religious traditions, that have contributed to the American heritage and to contemporary American society.
- 10) The changing role of the United States in the outside world; relations between domestic affairs and foreign policy; American interactions with other nations and regions, historically and in recent times. The United States as a colonial power and in two world wars. The Cold War and global economic relations.
- 11) The distinctively American tensions between liberty and equality, liberty and order, region and nation, individualism and the common welfare, and between cultural diversity and civic unity.
- 12) The major successes and failures of the United States, in crises at home and abroad. What has “worked” and what has not, and why.

III. Political Science (Civics)

- 1) Successful students have a basic understanding of types of governments. They:
 - a) Understand the nature and source of various types of political authority (e.g., the differences between democracy and oligarchy).
- 2) Successful students have a basic understanding of the U.S. political system and its history. They:
 - a) Know basic facts about the U.S. political system and constitutional government (e.g., federalism; checks and balances; and legislative, executive and judiciary branches of power).
 - b) Understand the content and context of documents that established the U.S., especially The Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.
 - c) Understand the content and context of documents important for the protection of individual rights in the U.S., especially the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.
 - d) Know the methods citizens can use to participate in the political process at local, state and national levels, and how political participation can influence public policy.

IV. Geography

Below are entry-level competencies in geography. These competencies encompass general concepts in Geography, Physical Geography and Human Geography. It is not our expectation that students would be fully conversant in these concepts when entering college, but that they

would have been exposed to many of them. Traditionally, place name identification has been conceived of as the main focus of geography, but much more important are the major geographical concepts and cultural understanding of the diversity of the places in the world. Geographical approaches link many different branches of the social sciences, as well as the physical sciences. As such students who have exposure to these concepts will be more likely to succeed in not only college-level geography courses, but they will be in a stronger position to succeed in other courses, such as: introduction to physical science, surveys of American and world history, introduction to sociology and anthropology courses, and beginning government courses. Students meeting entry-level expectations in geography will be able to:

- 1) Use maps to determine and define major geographical units, such as: regions, continents, countries, and major cities.
- 2) Identify and interpret different types of maps, such as: topographic (raised relief and contour), cartograms, proportional symbol, and choropleth maps
- 3) Identify and define places by understanding ethnicity; language and language systems; and patterns of religion
- 4) Define and distinguish between concepts of relative distance and absolute distance, relative direction and absolute direction, relative location and absolute location
- 5) Understand fundamental population models, such as the demographic transition model, and associated terminology, including but not limited to, total fertility rate, rate of natural increase, etc.
- 6) Describe different patterns of migration, the different types of migration, and the causes of migration
- 7) Read and interpret data in atlases, e.g. percentage of population who are farmers, population density, percentage of population that live in urban areas
- 8) Identify the continents of the world and their major topographic qualities, i.e. mountainous, high plateau, etc and demonstrate an understanding of how these qualities influence human settlement patterns
- 9) Distinguish between weather and climate and demonstrate an understanding of how climate influences human settlement patterns
- 10) Identify areas of the world by their dominant vegetation characteristics, i.e. savanna, tropics and demonstrate an understanding of how this influences human settlement patterns
- 11) Identify major bodies of water, i.e. oceans, seas, and major rivers and distinguish between fresh and salt water and demonstrate an understanding of how proximity to fresh water continues to influence human settlement patterns.